

## **Supporting Human Rights and Democracy: The U.S. Record 2006**

### **Kyrgyzstan**

Kyrgyzstan has a multiparty parliamentary system led by President Kurmanbek Bakiyev, whose July 2005 election marked tangible progress towards meeting international standards. On November 9, following a week-long opposition-led street protest, the country adopted a new constitution which held out the possibility of greater checks and balances between the branches of government. On December 30, the parliament adopted a revised version of the constitution that restored many powers to the president. The new constitution envisages a greater role for political parties, with half the seats in the next parliament to be elected by party lists. The government's respect for democracy and human rights improved in several areas, including freedom of assembly, fewer incidents of military hazing, improved prison conditions, some accountability for abuses by law enforcement officials, and modest anticorruption efforts. Despite these improvements, serious problems remained. Members of the security forces at times tortured or abused persons, often with impunity. Arbitrary or unlawful killings, arbitrary arrest and detention, and the disappearance of and failure to protect refugee and asylum seekers were problems. Prison conditions remained very poor, contributing to prison riots and attempted suicides. Restrictions on citizens' rights to change their government persisted, but were less severe than in previous years. There was an increase in government harassment of the opposition and independent media. Physical attacks on opposition leaders and vandalism of media outlets by unknown assailants also occurred. The lack of judicial independence amid pervasive corruption continued to be a serious problem, limiting citizens' rights to due process. Trafficking in persons, violence against women and children, child labor, and discrimination against ethnic minorities were also problems.

The U.S. strategy to promote democracy and human rights focused on strengthening democratic institutions, including constitutional reform, increasing observance of human rights, combating corruption, supporting civil society, and promoting independent media. The United States maintained close contact with independent journalists, human rights activists, and politicians from across the political spectrum while encouraging dialogue between the government and civil society. The ambassador and visiting senior U.S. officials met frequently with members of the government, civil society, and human rights groups to encourage reform. During April and August visits to Bishkek, the assistant secretary of state for South and Central Asian affairs met with parliamentarians, religious clerics, government officials, and civil society activists to discuss democratic and constitutional reform. Another senior official followed up with similar meetings during an October visit. The ambassador also held a series of roundtables with journalists, students, and civil society activists in several regions of the country to discuss the need for further reform. In addition, she implemented an active public diplomacy program to help build support for reform. In June the U.S. ambassador to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe led a roundtable discussion with civic society leaders on constitutional reform.

The United States continued its support for training poll workers on the use of indelible ink as an effective antifraud tool for parliamentary by-elections. As with the 2005 presidential and parliamentary elections, the ink proved to be an effective measure in combating multiple voting, which had been a serious problem in previous elections. The United States provided financial and logistical support for monitors of the parliamentary by-elections and financed parallel vote tabulation. The U.S.-funded studies to improve electoral processes included accurate voter lists.

In preparation for the proposed referendum on a new constitution, three U.S.-supported NGOs carried out public education campaigns during the year. The three NGOs provided much-needed information and analysis on the draft constitutions under consideration, which were disseminated widely throughout the country. When the proposed referendum on constitutional drafts was not held, the public education campaigns were revised to focus on providing information and analysis of the December 30 constitution that was adopted by the parliament and approved by the president.

The United States continued its support for political party development through projects implemented by civil society organizations at the national and regional levels. These projects provided training and consultation to political parties on party platform development, constituent service provision, legislative advocacy, and communication skills.

The United States continued its support of civic education programs, supplying a total of 160,634 civic education textbooks to students around the country. Over 260,000 students in all 2,061 schools in the country benefited from U.S.-sponsored civic education program that promoted greater understanding of civic responsibility, women in political life, and international human rights.

Promoting media freedom and freedom of speech remained a U.S. priority. In bilateral and multilateral meetings, U.S. officials encouraged the government to bring its media laws in line with international standards, in particular by rescinding criminal penalties for libel and transforming state-owned television into an independent entity. During the year the United States continued to provide training to journalists from electronic and print outlets in an effort to improve professional standards and clarify the legal framework for media operation. The U.S. Government funded a group of media professionals to travel to the United States to learn about the role of the media in a democratic society. The United States continued its support for a local NGO that provides alternative dispute settlement for journalists. Throughout the year, the United States continued its support of the Media Support Center, which is the only independent printing press in the country and Central Asia. The first independent Central Asian news syndicate was launched with U.S. funds. The United States also supported media resource centers in the Ferghana Valley and over 20 information centers throughout the country with libraries and diverse media publications. U.S.-funded projects increased the professionalism of women journalists and coverage of women's issues and human rights. The United States also provided small grants to support independent media, Internet and information centers.

U.S. officials persistently encouraged the government to curb and publicly denounce NGO harassment. When an NGO leader was assaulted by unknown assailants and sustained a serious head injury, the ambassador visited him in the hospital and pressed the government to conduct an independent investigation, hold the perpetrators accountable, and ensure the leader's safety. The United States continued its strong support for a wide variety of programs designed to strengthen civil society and advocacy through a network of nine support centers that provide training, grants, legal assistance, and other services to NGOs all over the country. These centers are joined into the countrywide Association of Civil Society Support Centers that advocates at the national level on civil society issues. During the year 97 organizations participated in a total of 31 advocacy campaigns, including four at the national level. The association implemented a successful national-level advocacy campaign to oppose the Ministry of Justice's initiative to investigate local NGOs funded by international organizations.

The Coalition of Communication Operators, with U.S. support, successfully advocated fair tariffs in the communications market by convincing the government to adopt a law and documents for calculation of tariffs for all communication operators. This new law provides equal conditions for independent and government-funded media outlets and thereby helped level the media playing field.

The United States and the European Union jointly and successfully pressed the government to exercise restraint and respect freedom of assembly during the numerous rallies and protests throughout the year which, by and large, took place peacefully. A U.S. grant enabled a local foundation to monitor respect for freedom of assembly with the goal of supporting citizen activism and increasing awareness of democracy and human rights.

The United States continued programs to promote judicial reform and transparency and provided strong diplomatic support to anticorruption efforts. High-level U.S. officials visited and stressed to the president and prime minister the need to make anticorruption initiatives the centerpiece of their reform programs. The government continued implementation of a U.S.-sponsored pilot project to improve the effectiveness of the Bishkek traffic police and root out corruption within its ranks. The United States sponsored judicial training for commercial, criminal, and non-commercial civil judges, while a U.S.-funded local watchdog group continued monitoring courtrooms. The United States also continued programs promoting greater local government transparency. Several representatives from the Ministry of Justice visited the United States through the International Visitors Leadership Program to study the U.S. judicial and legal systems. The United States also provided grants to student groups at 12 universities and four teacher groups to combat corruption within the educational system. One of these grantees, a civil youth movement, increased students' awareness of their legal rights, improved the quality of university services, and promoted budget transparency and self-governing student bodies in two of the country's largest universities.

The United States supported a project to promote legal reform. A legal education clinic received a grant to assess legal clinics, recommend improvements, conduct seminars for legal clinic staff throughout the country, and provide the clinics with the latest materials on methodology, international standards, and teaching approaches.

Throughout the year, a U.S.-supported human rights defenders' network monitored prisons and pretrial detention facilities in an effort to prevent detainee abuse. The network also reported on human rights abuses around the country and worked with authorities at the local and national levels to prevent further abuses. The United States provided a series of 28 small grants to local NGOs to protect human rights, provide civic education, foster the rule of law, and promote the use of conflict prevention and resolution techniques.

During the year the United States continued to urge the government to turn over to UNHCR for third-country resettlement the four Uzbek refugees and one Uzbek asylum seeker who remained in detention after having fled the 2005 violence in Andijon. Following continuous advocacy efforts by U.S. authorities in both Bishkek and Washington, the secretary of state sent a letter to President Bakiyev in January reiterating the U.S. position. On August 9, against U.S. recommendations, the government forcibly returned these individuals to Uzbekistan. The United States publicly denounced this in Bishkek, Washington, and at the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. U.S. officials also called on the government to conduct an impartial investigation into the disappearance of other Uzbek asylum and refugee seekers.

To promote religious freedom, the United States maintained regular contacts with representatives of various religious communities and funded several Muslim religious leaders to visit the United States through IVLP. The ambassador hosted Iftar dinners for Muslim leaders in Bishkek and Osh, sponsored a roundtable on religious freedom, and visited the Islamic University and regional mosques. A U.S. official addressed a crowd of over 50,000 worshipers in Bishkek's main square on the Feast of Eid, which marks the end of Ramadan.

The United States continued to play a leading role in combating human trafficking. On numerous occasions U.S. officials lobbied the government to employ more effective means to combat trafficking. The U.S. Government supported a three-year project to combat trafficking in the country, with a particular focus on labor trafficking. The United States also sponsored antitrafficking information campaigns as well as seminars and training sessions aimed at law enforcement officials involved in antitrafficking efforts. The United States also continued to support the Sezim shelter for trafficking victims.